

home design real estate



nest

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SUMMER 2015

It's summertime and the living is...

outside, mostly. In this issue we focus on planting a bare backyard and making "rooms" outdoors. Plus, we take a home tour of a lakeside house called "Projector" and introduce the Nest House Hunt. All this and more in Seven Days' quarterly supplement about home design and real estate.

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Projector House, by Kristen Liljasperance
Photo by Carolyn Selles

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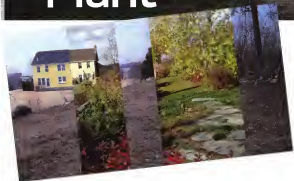
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Plans to Plant



A Charlotte landscape designer helps homeowners figure out their master plan

BY KEN PICARD

In the spring of 2014, after nearly two frustrating years of house hunting, my wife, Stacy, and I finally landed our dream home on a bucolic dead-end road in southern Chittenden County. The house sits on about an acre of partially wooded land, sandwiched between a working farm and nearly 100 acres of conserved forest.

Before-and-after landscaping of a Charlotte property (see the author's) by Anthony Robinson

LANDSCAPE



Our builder did a great job of finishing the house, both inside and out. He didn't landscape, but left plenty of trees. He also installed porches and a deck, repaved and sealed the lawn, and put in a gravel driveway and walking paths. When we moved in, we could immediately enjoy the benefits of the house as much as the inside.

A year later, Stacy and I had a good sense of how we used the property and what we wanted to change. Our first priority was modest: Replace the pavers our builder had used for walkways with large stepping stones. Though pavers work marginally well at keeping mud out of the house, they also end up everywhere, from the kids' bedrooms to inside the washing machine. Ironically, my bare feet find them in the middle of the night.

Once we began thinking about these new walking paths, however, our planning quickly spun in all directions. Should we install stone paths before deciding where to put gardens? What about planting new trees and shrubs to replace the poison ivy, poison persimmon and huckleberry that surrounded us? It seemed prudent to master plan the property before investing hundreds,

possibly thousands, of dollars in landscaping, just to find ourselves digging it up and replacing it later.

We needed professional help. So we turned to Abby Robinson, a professional landscape designer in Charlotte. A Vermont native with degrees in urban studies from the University of San Diego and landscape design from the Landscape Institute in Cambridge, Mass., Robinson agreed to visit our house and help us solidify our vision.

As we soon learned, her first priority — after walking the property and noting its topography, existing vegetation, views, drainage and exposure — was to sit down and get to know us.

"People often think they don't know what they want at all," Robinson explained. "But the more we talk and the more we ask questions about what they like to do, how they live and what they like about the property [the more] I get a sense for how people live."

Fortunately, Robinson said we'd avoided a common mistake: homeowners make when moving into a new house, trying to do too much too soon.

"Some people buy every plant under

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A Chertkida designed with landscape design by Jeffrey Harriss

Plans to Plant

the sun and decide that it's a good idea to put them somewhere on their property," she said. "It's great to be informed and excited to get your landscape planted and full. But 'planted' and 'full' tend to be challenges if they're not in the right spot and not taken care of."

Another common mistake is not researching which plants thrive in which conditions, or learning which ones need regular attention and upkeep.

As we discovered, picking plants is actually the last step in the planning process. To begin, Robinson helped us decide which areas of the lot to focus on and how to use them. Is this area for lounging and eating? Recreational activities? A cutting garden? Not all areas are compatible, she explained, so it's important not to site delicate flowers near a monumental gazebo where the kids' Frisbees and baseballs might land.

Robinson could tell immediately from the abundance of lawn chairs around our front porch, where we spend much of our time. The porch has a good view of Mount Pisgah, gets plenty of sun and attracts neighborhood kids who play with our children during the day — and then their parents, who come by in the evenings for beverages, drinks and socializing.

As we told Robinson, we wanted to enhance that area and make it more conducive to parties. Currently, the lawn slopes downward and away from the house. That's great for proper drainage, but not so much for staying upright in a lawn chair. And, of course,

we wanted to lose the pea-gravel mulch.

About a week later, Robinson returned with her rough sketches and estimates. We liked most of her ideas, such as tiered steps around our front porch leading to a stone patio where visitors could congregate. Other ideas were less to our taste, but she assured us that everything could be modified.

When I saw the estimated price tag — an excess of \$30,000 — I had a sticker shock. But Robinson reassured me that the figure included everything we'd discussed, including some ideas we later jettisoned.

More importantly, she explained, new homeowners should think of their landscaping as another family room.

"It's like an addition to your house," she said. "It's not going to be as pricey as adding another room or renovating a kitchen, but it's adding huge value and life."

And, unlike a new kitchen, Robinson pointed out, the landscaping doesn't need to be completed all at once — or by professionals.

"Once you get started, you're encouraged to do more," she added. "One part of the project might be a stepping stone, and you decide, 'Hey, we can do this, too!'"

I was convinced. I'd take a "stepping stone" over stepping on stones any day. 🐾

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Kristen L'Esperance of her
Projector House, Charlotte



Working the Angles

In a historic summer community, Projector House faces the lake in style

BY PAMELA POLSTON | PHOTOS BY MATTHEW THORSEN

Architectural designer Kristen L'Esperance was barely out of grad school at Pratt Institute, and looking at a bleak job market, when she fell into a plum professional project that she calls "the second half of my education." The job? Designing a house for her father. All by herself. And project managing the construction.

Stark and modern, Projector House is the impressive result. On Lakes Lane (yes, really) in Charlotte, the angular structure sits on the foundations of a previous home that burned down — and in which L'Esperance grew up.

"This property has been in my family for generations," she explains to a guest while preparing lunch. "My Uncle Bob had the first house here. Then my parents bought it." As a child, L'Esperance admits, she had a living in what she jokingly calls the "back porch" of Thompson's Point. "I felt like an exile," she says. When she was about 16, the

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Working the Angles by Lisa

L'Esperance says: Then he asked his newly trained daughter to design a new one.

"At first I said no," she admits. "But then, out of necessity, I had to move back to Vermont [from New York]. I thought, Gah, great — I have to find a job in Vermont in the meantime. I told my dad I would design a house and handle construction," L'Esperance says, "but, you are not a child!"

Building a house is stressful under the best of circumstances, never mind with parental oversight. But complete it she did, in 2012.

L'Esperance's parents, she says, "spread pretty



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WAS IMPORTANT
ABOUT THIS SITE.**

KRISTEN L'ESPERANCE

much every Sunday in summer here." For her, Projector House is a thoughtful, unswathed showcase in a growing design portfolio. As an apprentice with Essex Junction-based architect John Q. Deane, L'Esperance is on her way to becoming a licensed architect in Vermont, she says happily.

Projector House isn't just a demonstration of her skills but, thanks to a couple of energy-efficient woodstoves and passive solar heat, her year-round home. Though it was originally built to sell, keeping the home in the family seems like the way to go for now. "I decided to embrace it," L'Esperance says. "This house is so special, and I'm so lucky." ♥

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Line drawing of later by Kristen L'Esperance; view from upstairs porch in Projector House

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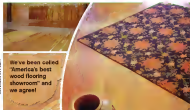


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He's single, 28 years old and a health care IT consultant. James is hunting for a duplex — ideally, he says, in Burlington, South Burlington or Winooski.

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When James has found his home, we'll be giving him a housewarming present: three hours of complimentary organization or interior design services from Jane Murthy/Joane of Interior Rejuvenation in Burlington.



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Out With the Indoors

Seven ways to decorate your backyard or deck

BY MOLLY WALSH

One of the pleasures of summer in Vermont is opening the back door and padding onto a sunny deck or the soft grass of a backyard — preferably barefoot. That space outdoors may have sky for a ceiling, but it's still a room of sorts. And whether it's an apartment balcony, a petite city yard or a sprawling back 40, it will be more enjoyable when it's welcoming and conveys your sense of style.

Here are seven suggestions for making an outdoor space all your own this summer.

1. Define the space.

Look carefully at the area. Draw the borders on graph paper to size them up. Study existing features with an eye toward obscuring unsightly aspects with hedges, fencing, trellises or even sheer panels of cloth that float from a porch opening. Plan to draw the eye toward pretty features with landscaping that frames a great view, or interesting trim such as recast metal roof slats (you'll find free) edged around a personal bed.

Choose a space for outdoor furniture that opens up toward a sculptural couple or other form instead of toward the doorway.

In a small yard, consider using private but higher-quality materials for boundaries—real stone, or perhaps a custom made wood fence instead of hardware-store stuff. In small areas, quality materials needn't bust the budget, and their beauty will be appreciated for years to come.

In a larger expanse, create a series of "rooms" instead of trying to decorate a football field. South Burlington interior designer Trice Stroutman framed a cottage garden with an unpainted picket fence within her expansive property. The enclosure beside her century-old farmhouse looks out on a grassy yard, a handsome lawn and a stunning mountain view. Yet Stroutman's cozy garden, brimming with hostas, leucop hydrangeas and descendants of her mother's



dark-pink peonies, feel like an outdoor sitting room.

"I like it more intimate," said Stroutman, who owned Left Bank House in Garden in downtown Burlington from 2001 to 2006. "We have a lot of property here, and I was trying to sort of rein it in."

2. Accent with salvage and collectible items.

Quint: a shed with old lattice windows. Plant screens in vintage receptacles. When Stroutman found a smooth, white baby tub at the Brimfield Antique Show in Massachusetts, she hauled it home for use as a planter and placed it at one end of a curved walkway between her house and a recently constructed garage/barn.

Stroutman's taste is eclectic; she looks for items at high end and low end places, including garage sales and the free pile at her local trash-transfer station. "It's amazing what you can find," she said.

3. Furnish the "room."

A four-green wicker rocker, a silver spray-painted metal chair or a glass patio table can help turn the yard or deck into a gathering place for company.

Pay attention to proportion. Don't cram Grandma's pie pans set of ornate rattan furniture onto a tiny apartment balcony. Instead, find a pair of thin-brimmed chairs and a folding metal patio table with an oval top—no corners to bump into.

In a big space, create several groupings: a bench or chairs beside the ferns and lavender in the garden, a hammock suspended from the

spruce trees, a few Adirondack chairs at the top of the hill.

Mary Heinrich Ales, owner of Vintage Inspired Lifestyle Marketplace in Burlington's South End, described a red industrial metal barrel that holds a potted plant in her garden. She also pulled an old sugar-off a tractor, dug it into the garden and called it a sculpture.

And no worries about eroding metal to the elements. "It just gets a better patina when it's exposed," said Ales. "In five or six years, two of her best sellers for plant receptacles are wash buckets (about \$30) and metal sap buckets (\$10 or less)." "You wear them with the holes in the bottom so [the water] will drain," Ales noted.

4. Hang it.

Trees themselves are great places to suspend a birdhouse, a hummingbird feeder or a lantern with a flickering, wicker candle. Punctuate ponds and shrub walls with a support bracket for flowering baskets, or use walk-on porches and decks. Metal screens are full of items that can be affixed to outdoor surfaces: fence vintage signs, tin signs, miniature crock pickles, even lobster bays, if that's what floats your boat. Who says the outdoors can't be a gallery?

5. Use water.

The sound of moving water soothes the senses and lessens traffic noise, not to mention the roar of a neighbor's lawn mower. And you don't need to achieve the effect. A search for cheap backyard fountains will turn up models starting for \$40 or less.

Keep in mind that most "winter fountains" call for electricity. No outdoor outlet? Then look for solar-powered birdfountains or bubblers. And for a party, you can always fill up a kiddie pool with ice water. Just cover it with a Tip-Topper, and dare your friends to step in and cool their ankles.

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6. Light it.

Wrap strands of LED light to around a deck railing or a tree trunk, or strand them from a porch, a pergola or tree branches. Plenty of retailers oblige customers who want to duplicate Christmas in July. Some lights require an outlet; others run on batteries. Prices can range from \$14.95 to more than \$100 per strand.

7. Decorate to sell.

Is it time to sell your home or condo? If so, staging your outdoor space is just as important as what you do indoors. And many of the same principles apply. Get rid of clutter — e.g., a broken wheelbarrow or clipped flower stems. Edge the lawn, trim the deck and prune trees so they don't touch the house or garage.

Then do some editing. "If you have a collection of gardens, have three gardens in one location, don't have a family of three scattered throughout," advised Donald G. Ingram, a realtor with Keller Williams. The same goes for perennial beds. "The biggest mistake that most people make with gardens is



they have too many — the one," Ingram admitted. "Because the average person's going to come along and look at all of the gardens and landscaping and say, 'I could never keep up with that.'"

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Gardening Lite

How to plant containers

BY SASH WILLIAMS

I live in an apartment with an incredibly shady so-called backyard: a 10-by-15-foot expanse of dirty concrete tucked behind my driveway. I've always wanted a big garden, but, unless a demolition crew knocks down the buildings blocking my sun, rips up the concrete and lays down good gardening soil, it's not going to happen. While a girl can prag, this season I settled on a more practical solution.

Container gardens can be tailored to any outdoor—or indoor—environment. Get all shade? There's a plant for that. Full sun? Lucky you, grow some tomatoes. With pots in every size, shape and color, and myriad varieties of plants to choose from, the combinations are endless.

Before getting started on my own potted arrangements, I headed over to Just Darning Gardens & Greenhouses in Wilmette, where owner Sabrinaby Milbury gave me a lesson on how not to screw it up.

"Before you start, you need to know where you want the container to go and what the light conditions are," Milbury began. If your patio gets six or more hours



Sabrinaby Milbury

a beautiful container garden full of plants that want full sun, and you put it somewhere [with] less than three hours, it's just not going to be happy."

Next, we talked soil. Container gardens call for lighter soil than traditional gardens, and you may need

to make adjustments depending on what you're growing. If you're growing flowers, a non-organic potting soil works just fine. Milbury recommends Pro-Mix, which she has used for 15 years. For vegetables, fruits and herbs, however, she switches to Vermont Compost Company's Fast Veg organic potting soil. "If we're growing vegetables, we're going to eat it," she pointed out. "I want to use an organic soil."

Regardless of whether you're growing cucumbers or Giffers daisies, you'll need to fertilize. "For anything that's not edible, I use a time-release fertilizer mixed into the soil," Milbury said. For vegetables, she uses Pro-Gro from North Country Organics, a liquid fertilizer that is applied weekly.

As for selecting a pot, the only requirement is that it have a hole in the bottom. And pot size matters. Bigger is definitely better. "The bigger the pot, the easier it is to keep it watered," Milbury explained. "Because it's got more soil, it'll hold more moisture."

She cautioned against using saucers under outdoor pots. "Saucers are great inside, because they catch water if it's dripping, but outside the roots are sitting in it, and you don't want that, because they can rot." Not to mention that standing water is a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

We picked out a medium-size, bright orange pot to light up my gloomy little strip of

MATERIALS

- Large pot with a hole in the bottom
- Potting soil
- Large plastic tub
- Fertilizer (time-release or liquid)
- Fast strip of broken pottery large enough to slip or sink in saucer
- Soil Moist
- Plants
- Plastic tarp



DIRECTIONS

Preparing soil: Fill your pot(s) with soil (a mix of 1/3 topsoil, 1/3 compost, 1/3 perlite) to the top of the pot. Add the recommended amount of fertilizer (see the label) and mix thoroughly. Soak the top 1/3 of the soil with water. Let this sit for a few minutes. Then walk through with your hands so the soil becomes damp throughout. (I don't mind the soil being a bit soggy but it shouldn't be bone dry.)

Filling the pot: Lay the small pieces of broken pottery or mesh across the hole at the bottom of your pot. It shouldn't completely cover it, but should keep the soil from falling out while allowing water to drain. Fill the pot one-third of the way with your dampened soil. Add a 1/2 cup of perlite or soil mix, not thoroughly mix it in the pot to assist in breaking the soil with the remaining soil.

Potting your plants: try a few different arrangements before you start planting. Once you've settled on a design, gently shake your original plants to remove your media and middle finger. Slip over the plastic container and gently wiggle it loose. Scoop out a hole in your soil, settle the plant into it, and fill in with soil to your original growing depth. Repeat for each plant.

Water: At this point, it is to give your pot a good soak. When water runs out the bottom, you know you've soaked every bit of soil and given your newly potted plants the moisture to grow and root. This will keep them nourished and happy. Don't forget about overhead in a few days.

Continued care: If you'd like, use a slow release fertilizer. Water your container garden with a liquid fertilizer once a week. If you planted vegetables, make sure it's organic.

Note: If you plan on growing vegetables, fruits or herbs, avoid the first 10 days after planting. Then you can use a liquid fertilizer and organic fertilizer. If you plan on growing vegetables, make sure it's organic.

concrete. Now all that remained was to pick out plants. There's no rule for how many to use. Some people follow the "thriller, filler, spiller" model and use tall statement plants in back, fuller, slightly smaller varieties in the middle, and trailing plants to spill over the sides. That sounds works, but Milbury encourages gardeners to go for what they love.

SOME PEOPLE FOLLOW THE "THRILLER, FILLER, SPILLER" MODEL FOR PICKING OUT PLANTS.

I settled on a combination of spiky-leaved angel wing begonia, two funky fuchsias, a red stemmed lady fern, a chocolate heuchera and sprawling ivy geranium.

For about \$60, my new container garden helped light up an otherwise boring backyard. It's a good thing I haven't called in the demolition crew. I'm going to need that concrete slab to support more container gardens this summer. 🍷

INFO

Safe money: Milbury offers workshops and classes at her Williston greenhouse gardens (biggreenhouse.com).

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